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Demographic and social statistics: human settlements statistics

Report of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)

Note by the Secretary General

1. The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report on human settlements statistics prepared by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), which is contained in the annex. The report is transmitted to the Commission in accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-first session.[1]

Points for discussion

2. The Commission may wish to review the work on the human settlements statistics programme.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2000, Supplement No 4* (E/2000/24), para. 1.

* E/CN.3/2001/1

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Annex

Human settlements statistics

Report of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)

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I. Developing and improving human settlements statistics concepts, definitions and classifications

1. The human settlements statistics programme was initiated in the late 1970s, in response to the increased focus and concerns on housing, infrastructure, services, security and sustainable development of human settlements in a fast urbanizing world. It was designed to achieve two major goals: collection, processing and dissemination of international human settlements statistics and to assist member States in improving national human settlements statistics by developing and enhancing methodological guidelines.

2. While international statistics on housing conditions were targeted early on by the United Nations Statistics Division through three compendiums of housing statistics,[a] it was only after the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Vancouver, 31 May-11 June 1976) that attention to the increased concentration of people in urban areas necessitated combining concepts of housing conditions with concepts of living conditions in human settlements. Based on the Conference's findings and recommendations and on the conclusion of the Statistical Commission at its twenty-first session,[b] the United Nations Statistics Division developed and launched the Human Settlements Statistics Questionnaire 1983 (HSSQ/83) which introduced definitions and concepts of human settlements statistics, drawing extensively on the framework for integration of social, demographic and related statistics.[c]

3. Simultaneously with developing methodology for data collection and dissemination, efforts were made to develop guidelines for building national capacities in this field. To that end, the feasibility for improving the methodology for collecting and disseminating data on human settlements within the framework of environmental statistics was explored.[d] Furthermore, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) sponsored and organized an Expert Group Meeting (Nairobi, Kenya, 1987)[e] that reviewed in detail international definitions, concepts and classifications. The meeting's recommendations emphasized the need to collect and disseminate statistics at city levels. It also offered guidance for further improvements of data collection and dissemination.

4. As a result, the United Nations Statistics Division and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) jointly developed the Human Settlements Statistics Questionnaire 1992 (HSSQ/92), the purpose of which was twofold: (a) to collect human settlements statistics and (b) to offer a methodological model that would be applied at the national level.

5. Based on experiences gathered through HSSQ/92 and on national housing census practices, the United Nations Statistics Division undertook the revision of population and housing census recommendations.[f] In the area of monitoring housing conditions, major revisions refer to the classification of housing units and clear distinction between "housekeeping" and "household-dwelling" concepts. Also in the field of living conditions, the distinction between facilities for exclusive use and shared facilities has been introduced. Several topics that were present in many national housing censuses were introduced (floor area per occupant, for example).

6. These revised concepts were applied in developing the Human Settlements Statistics Questionnaire 1999 (HSSQ/99), focusing on measuring housing and living conditions in more urbanized human settlements and emphasizing a methodological framework for combining different sources of statistics into an instrument for monitoring human settlements conditions.

7. One of the major methodological issues related to human settlements statistics refers to homelessness. While attempts were made to define homelessness under the United Nations "Shelter for All" initiative, quantitative assessment of this phenomenon is still prone to inaccuracies and misinterpretation. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) in the past initiated the review of existing international and national standards.[g] However, agreement on an internationally recommended concept that could be applied nationally is yet to be reached.

II. Supporting United Nations global conferences on human settlements and the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)

8. One of the major goals of the human settlements statistics programme over the years was to provide support for major United Nations conferences by assembling and disseminating statistical information on housing and living conditions. The first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Vancouver, Canada, 1976) was supported by producing a statistical annex,[h] a set of derived measures combined with raw data, used for supporting the major findings and recommendations of the Conference.

9. The second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) was held in Istanbul in 1996. The human settlements statistics programme prepared statistical material in support of this Conference: (a) the Statistical Annex to the second Global Report on Human Settlements,[i] a major background document for Habitat II, based on statistics collected through HSSQ/92; (b) the fifth issue of the *Compendium of Human Settlements Statistics*,[j] also based on statistics collected through HSSQ/92; (c) the human settlements atlas and two wall charts on human settlements conditions, which were produced as popular statistical material for the Conference; and (d) a number of statistical databases produced for the Istanbul conference, such as the Human Settlements Statistics Database, Version 4.0; Datahouse, Version 1.0; and UNCHS-CitiBase.

10. The main outcome of the Istanbul conference has been the Habitat Agenda,[k] which was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/177 of 16 December 1996. The forthcoming special session of the Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda will be supported by a number of outputs produced during the preparatory stage of the special session: Statistical Annex to the third Global Report on Human Settlements and wall charts on human settlements conditions, prepared by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). The most comprehensive statistical background and reference document will be the *Compendium of Human Settlements Statistics, 2001* (sixth issue, in preparation), which again has been jointly produced by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the United Nations Statistics Division. Furthermore, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) will produce the second Global Urban Indicators Database, which aims at presenting another, more city-oriented, source of data for the special session. The compilation of urban indicators is based on resolution 17/1 adopted by the Commission on Human Settlements at its seventeenth session,[l] in which the Commission requested the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) to reduce the earlier endorsed 46 urban indicators to a minimum set of 20 key items for monitoring the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

III. Quantitative monitoring of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

11. The Habitat Agenda, in its paragraph 228 (m), sets out the Centre's role in monitoring the implementation of the Habitat Agenda as follows: "To analyse and monitor major trends in urbanization and the impact of policies for urban and rural settlements, to trade progress in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, and to continue its publications programme including, inter alia, publication of the Global State of Human Settlements report".

12. The third sentence of paragraph 239 of the Habitat Agenda reads as follows: "The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), together with other relevant organizations, will be responsible for establishing an appropriate process for analysing and monitoring major trends in urbanization and the impact of urban policies".

13. The instruments for quantitative monitoring put in place by the Centre refer to several products. The Compendium of Human Settlements Statistics, with its wide country and city coverage, and its regular publication cycle, provides a comprehensive instrument for the quantitative monitoring of the Habitat Agenda. It is the main product of the joint United Nations Statistics Division/United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) human settlements statistics

programme incorporating a widely accepted methodology, and regular national-level data collection and dissemination. Secondly, based on the *Compendium*, there are two offspring products, namely, the Statistical Annex to the Global Report on Human Settlements and an electronic publication entitled "Human Settlements Conditions and Trends: Country Profiles and Statistical Analyses" published in 1999.

14. Monitoring the Habitat Agenda entails also developing new and enhanced instruments to measure change. This is especially true at the level of cities, as they are the main focus of the Habitat Agenda. In this context, monitoring encompasses data collection and dissemination and includes introducing different, more city-oriented statistical concepts.

IV. Further activities in improving international human settlements statistics and national capacities

15. As discussed in section I of the present report, improving human settlements statistics concepts and methods is a major concern of this programme. In this context, regular evaluation of the concepts is a necessity. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) initiated a process for organizing an expert group meeting in the biennium 2002-2003. The topics will be discussed with the United Nations Statistics Division in detail at later stages and will include evaluation of present concepts, definitions and methods, including homelessness and improving city statistics. Several other topics shown to be of particular interest for the development of human settlements may also be included (such as secure tenure and good urban governance).

16. Human settlements statistics collection, processing and dissemination established at present as a regular quinquennial production of the *Compendium of Human Settlements Statistics* and accompanying databases, are viewed as constituting an effective instrument for monitoring and supporting major United Nations conferences. Past experience shows this to be an appropriate source of data for other international purposes and of useful guidelines for development of human settlement statistics at the national level, therefore, this cycle should be maintained.

17. The Habitat Agenda tackles a range of issues relevant to cities as the largest human settlements and, in its Global Plan of Action (chap. IV of the Habitat Agenda), defines a series of actions needed to ensure sustainable development as well as a secure and liveable environment. A number of these issues are peculiar to cities (for example, average commuting time, urban poverty, overcrowdedness and so forth). Consequently, and in order to ensure instruments for monitoring the Habitat Agenda, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the United Nations Statistics Division should work jointly on providing guidelines for developing a body of city statistics at the international level.

V. Points for discussion

18. The Commission may wish to:

(a) Endorse the human settlements statistics programme as presented, including the quinquennial cycle for data collection and dissemination;

(b) Encourage the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) in consultation with the United Nations Statistics Division to convene an expert group meeting to evaluate existing methodologies and data-collection and dissemination instruments, as well as concepts and sources of city statistics.

Notes

[a] *Compendium of Housing Statistics 1971* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E/F.73/XVII.4), *Compendium of Housing Statistics 1972-74* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E/F.75/XVII.12), and *Compendium of Housing Statistics 1975-77* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E/F.80/XVII.4).

[b] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1981, Supplement No.2* (E/1981/12), para. 116.

[c] *Studies in the Integration of Social Statistics: Technical Report, Studies in Methods, No. 24* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.79.XVII.4).

[d] *Concepts and Methods of Environment Statistics: Human Settlements Statistics — A Technical Report, Studies in Methods, No. 51* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.88.XVII.14).

[e] Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Human Settlements Statistics, held from 12 to 16 October 1987, Nairobi, as prepared by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and United Nations Statistics Division, 1987.

[f] *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 1, Statistical Papers, No. 67/Rev.1* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.8).

[g] Sabine Springer, "Homelessness: a proposal for a global definition and classification", *Habitat International*, vol. 24 (2000), pp. 475-484.

[h] *Global Review of Human Settlements: Statistical Annex*, prepared by Statistical Office, Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (Exeter, United Kingdom, Pergamon Press, 1976).

[i] *An Urbanizing World: Global Report on Human Settlements* (Oxford, United Kingdom, Oxford University Press, 1996).

[j] *Compendium of Human Settlements Statistics, 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XVII.11).

[k] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul, 3-14 June 1996* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.97.IV.6), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[l] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 8* (A/54/8), annex I, sect. A.